

## The Cancellation Feature: (s)he looks like a ....., but deep down (s)he really isn't

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There is a long standing quandary in syntactic and semantic analysis, or several similar quandaries: Given some very well established syntactic feature or category, such as Verb, Mood (features), Preposition, Determiner, how/ why is it that their members 'usually' share a core of categorial meaning, but not always? Thus, Verbs generally denote "Activities" (Somebody or something "does something"), but a small minority of Verbs does not: *need, owe, own, possess*, etc. Perhaps we should say that these latter "Stative" Verbs are not really Verbs. Along the same lines, Pronouns denote "Reference", and then perhaps Expletives (*it, there, so*) are not really Pronouns.

But then there is a problem. For example, Stative verbs exhibit typical verbal inflections and have the word order of verbs. Expletive pronouns have morphological and syntactic properties of pronouns, etc.

Overall, of the thousands of English verbs, most indicate an Activity, as confirmed by diagnostics such as felicitously answering 'What *did X do?*' and appearing in progressive tense (a-b). Yet some significant small number of them, the so-called Stative Verbs, fails these two particular diagnostics, as seen in (c-f).

a. *What did they do yesterday? She did nothing, and she's still doing nothing.*

b. *What he did was sleep all day, and he's still sleeping.*

c. *What does she do at work? \*She owns a good computer. \*She is intelligent.*

d. *\*What she does at work is own a good computer.*

e. *What is he doing this week? \*He's knowing how to find a job. \*He's very handsome.*

f. *\*What he should do this week is be handsome.*

(There are also jocular answers, i.e. playing with well-formedness, which I put to the side.)

The issue is, does linguistic theory need a syntactic feature and a separate semantic feature, say Activity, that largely corresponds to but isn't the same as V? The paper argues that no, V and the interpretation of Activity are the same thing. The discrepancy is due to there being a single uniform feature + $\emptyset$ , across categories, whose positive (= Marked) value means:

### **Cancellation Feature + $\emptyset$ .**

The category appearing with + $\emptyset$  is not interpreted at Logical Form.

If Stative verbs are V, + $\emptyset$ , we understand why they inflect and in most constructions act just like Activity verbs, that is, both classes move, inflect and assign case alike.

With this feature + $\emptyset$ , we can understand why the category I of modals (and of Romance subjunctive mood) can act *syntactically* like e.g. English finite inflections. In short, Modals are I and finite inflections, fewer in number than modals, are I, + $\emptyset$ . Both classes predictably share, e.g., the NICE properties.

Similarly, we understand why personal pronouns and expletives have similar distributions and morphological forms. Both classes are Ds not followed by (overt) NPs, and D denotes reference. But the latter are also D, + $\emptyset$  without any interpreted reference. Likewise, the "empty" Prepositions *of* and *with* (these latter are P, + $\emptyset$ ) have much of the syntax of PPs (Preposition stranding in English, being the heads of focused PPs in cleft sentences, sufficing to assign case, and occurring as complements to Ns and As, unlike bare DPs or VPs). Given the cancellation feature, we can associate P with an LF interpretation of location in space and time; this interpretation is cancelled for *of* and *with*.

By virtue of the Cancellation Feature, a purely syntactic device, we can eliminate postulating a separate set of semantic features that overlap with the central syntactic features in a quite redundant way. The result is a set of categories which parsimoniously moves toward an overall conflation or identification of syntax and semantics.